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DEPARTMENT PASS NSC FOR MICHELE GAVIN
COMMERCE FOR KBURESS
ENERGY FOR GPERSON
TREASURY FOR DPETERS, RHALL, RABDULRAZAK
STATE PASS USTR FOR LISER, AGAMA
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR KSAMPLE
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN, MSTUCKART, JEDWARDS
STATE PASS TDA FOR EEBONG, DSHUSTER
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER
STATE PASS USAID FOR NFREEMAN, GBERTOLIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NONVIOLENCE ACTIVISTS ADVOCATE ELECTORAL

REFORM

¶1. (U) Summary: On June 25, Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Director of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, University of Rhode Island met in Lagos for with leaders of Muslim organizations dedicated to religious tolerance for a round-table discussion. Dr. LaFayette described briefly his experiences as a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King and summarized Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence and its effectiveness as a catalyst for change. Nigerian Muslim leaders discussed the relevance of Dr. Martin Luther King's tactics in the Nigerian context, and agreed that Nigeria must seek change by nonviolent means. Ethnic and religious differences and poverty, they said, were exploited by the ruling elite to retain power. Electoral reform and free and fair elections are, they said, the surest means of ending ethnic and religious rivalries and tension in Nigeria. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In a round-table discussion at the Consulate Lagos on June 25, Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Director of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies at the University of Rhode Island, met with Muslim leaders from organizations dedicated to religious tolerance. Dr. LaFayette opened the round-table by describing very briefly his association with Dr. Martin Luther King and King's philosophy of nonviolence. The discussion then turned to Nigeria and the challenges of applying nonviolence in the Nigerian context. Abdulkareem Shefiu, of the Islamic Platform, said that ethnic and religious differences are exploited by Nigeria's ruling elite to distract attention from the failings of the government, but the greatest "tool" in the hands of the ruling politicians was poverty. He claimed that poor men are easily seduced by patronage to commit acts of violence. Iman Abdul Abubakar of the Interfaith Mediation Center concurred, adding that ethnic and religious differences only became important to the population in the absence of real development. Ethnic and religious differences in Nigeria are not unbridgeable, he claimed, pointing out that no Nigerian leader has ever been able to come to power without appealing across ethnic and

religious lines and citing particularly the popularity of Murtalla Muhammad even in the South. He suggested that performing governors like Fashola in Lagos State did not need to fear - or fuel - ethnic and religious violence. Today, however, all the Nigerian participants to the round-table agreed, incompetent and corrupt politicians were increasingly exploiting ethnic and religious differences as a means to "divide and conquer" - or hold subjugated - the population.

¶3. (U) Professor Lai Olurode of the University of Lagos and Islamic Network for Development drew the conclusion that only free and fair elections would solve Nigeria's ethnic and religious tensions. The discussion therefore turned to how nonviolence means could be used to force a ruling party, that knows it could never retain power if free and fair elections are held, to commit political suicide by allowing such elections. Unfortunately, time did not permit this topic to be explored in depth, but a consensus was reached that any nonviolence focus in Nigeria should target ending the "election violence" that kept all Nigerians, regardless of religious or ethnic background, disenfranchised.

¶4. (U) Comment: The discussion was very open and lively suggesting it would be profitable to repeat the exercise during Dr. LaFayette's next trip to Nigeria, perhaps in a larger forum. End Comment.

¶5. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR